

IN MEMORIAM

RICHARD HARLEY DAVIS, 1946—1983

The Arkansas botanical community lost a dedicated friend and contributor with the death of Richard Harley Davis on December 8, 1983. His professional life as a botanist was short-lived but was marked by a lasting contribution to a better understanding of plant distributions in the state.

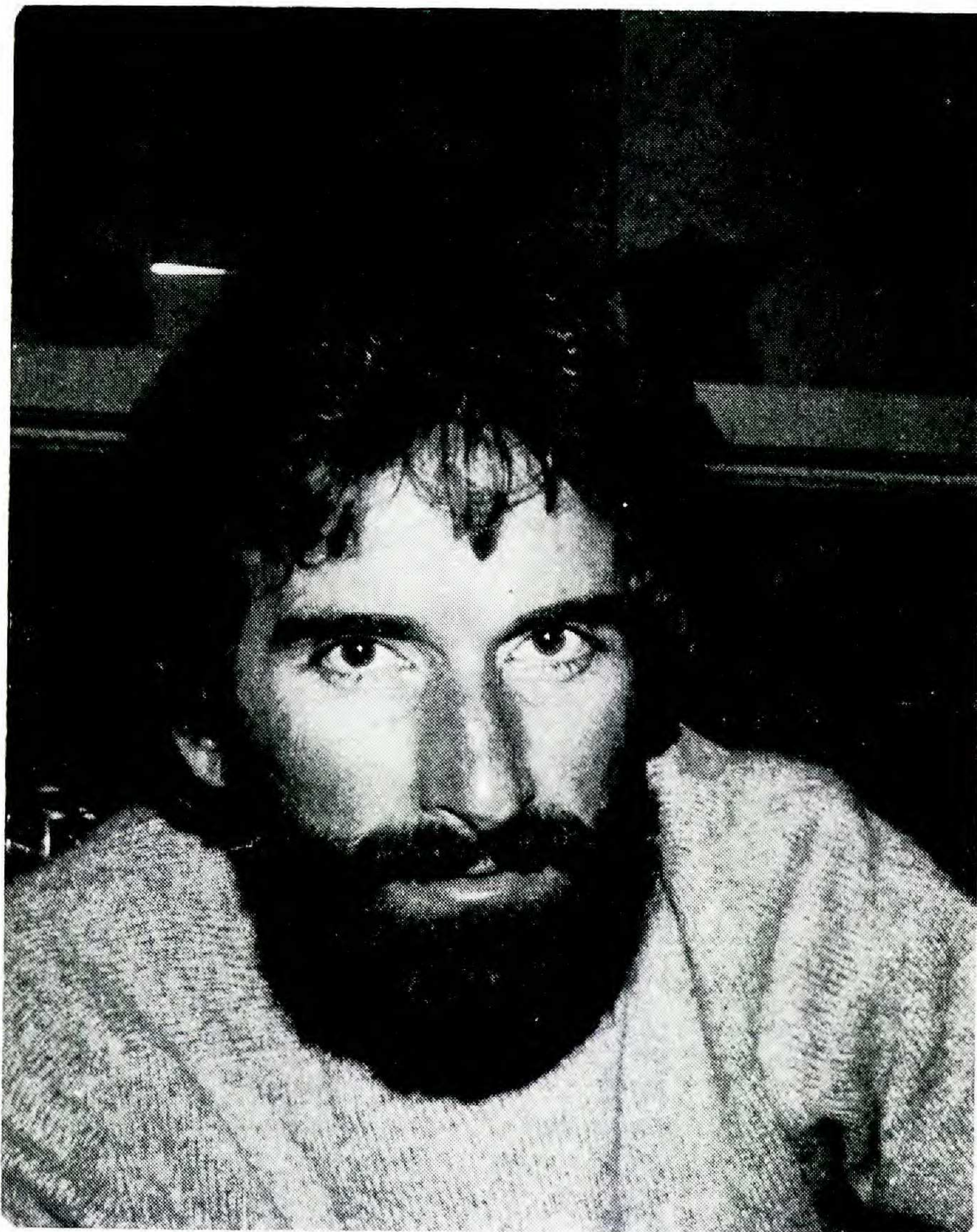
Richard Davis was born in Kingsville, Texas, on January 10, 1946, the son of Max and Ruth Davis. His immediate survivors include only his father and his sister, Kay Davis.

Graduating from high school in 1964 at El Dorado, Arkansas, where he spent most of his childhood, Richard enrolled as a biology major at Arkansas Tech University. He left Tech in 1966 and spent two years with the marines in Viet Nam. After service he returned to Tech and graduated with a B.S. in Biology in 1972. Following graduation he taught high school science courses at Altus and Atkins, Arkansas.

Richard spent the year of 1975 as a graduate student in the Department of Botany and Bacteriology, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. The following year he took a job with the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission as a field ecologist, employment that involved field work and introduced him to natural areas preservation, a field that soon had his commitment (his final request was that any memorials be sent to The Nature Conservancy, 300 Spring Building, Suite 415, Little Rock, AR 72201). He returned to the University in 1977 and completed his M.S. in Botany in 1978. His thesis, completed under Dr. E. E. Dale, was "Criteria for the Selection of National Natural Landmarks in the Interior Highlands Physiographic Region, Central U. S."

During 1979-81 Richard was employed by The Nature Conservancy, where he developed a working list of rare plants of Arkansas and made extensive plant collections. The bulk of his collections have been deposited at Arkansas Tech University (APCR). Additional specimens are deposited at the University of Arkansas (UARK) and smaller numbers at Vanderbilt University (VDB).

Richard was an untiring worker in the field and had matured to a high level of competency as a field botanist. Going to the field with him was an experience. Almost always dressed in short pants, often without a shirt, and often in sandals, he could penetrate any vegetation type. Nothing was too difficult or too much trouble if it meant getting to see a plant that was new to him. My last field experience with Richard was a three-day trip to Stone County, Arkansas, in August 1982. He confided to me at that time that he had a diagnosis of terminal cancer. Wanting to see the West one more



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time he left Arkansas, returning to Arkansas almost exactly one year later, in 1983, with the realization that the worst had come true. He had come home to die.

He was a man of extremely simple life style and surrounded himself with few possessions. At the same time Richard was a complex person. Periodically he would feel the urge to travel, and over the years he made many trips to Mexico, Central America, and all parts of the U. S. Much of his travel was by bicycle. It was on these trips that he often took work as a gardener, painter, boat-builder—any job with which he could make a little extra money that would enable him to “see the country and new plants.” He enjoyed physical labor and always was in the best of physical condition—up until the very last.

In many respects Richard was a person born too late. He was intrigued with the era of professional plant collectors and what appeared to him to have been a much simpler life style. He was a product of the 1960's; his stint with the military in Viet Nam had a devastating effect on him and was to shape much of what he did in later years. Metaphysics held a long-term interest for him, and he read voraciously on the subject, forever searching for the meaning of his existence.

Richard was a gentle person, sensitive to the aesthetic and to the environment, and much loved by those who let themselves get close to him. He held tightly to his principles, sometimes to the point of obstinacy; he was the original idealist, and often his ideals collided forcefully with reality. But that was what made Richard what he was.

Richard Davis left a valuable collection of plant specimens for botanists of the future to pore over in the herbarium. Perhaps this remembrance will help those of the future have a glimmer of understanding of the collector. He had a zeal for field work that made trips to the field with him memorable.—*Gary Tucker, Biological Sciences Dept., Arkansas Tech University, Russellville, AR 72801, U.S.A.*